
Mr. Emerson's
DISCOURSE
ON THE
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

*At a meeting of the Militia Officers in the town of Harvard, July
4th, 1794,*

IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY VOTED,

THAT Capt. Thaddeus Pollard, Lieut. Samuel Barnard,
and Lieut. Benjamin Robbins be a committee to wait on
the Rev. William Emerson, and in the name of the Officers and
soldiers of their respective companies to thank him for his dis-
course delivered this day, at their request, and to ask him a copy
thereof for the press.

Attest,

JACOB ROBBINS, *Clerk.*

A
DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN

H A R V A R D,

July 4, 1794.

AT THE REQUEST OF THE MILITARY OFFICERS
IN THAT PLACE,

WHO, WITH THE MILITIA UNDER THEIR COMMAND, WERE THEN ASSEMBLED
TO COMMEMORATE THE

ANNIVERSARY OF THE
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

By WILLIAM EMERSON, A. M.
MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN HARVARD.



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MDCCXCIV.

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

NEW YORK

AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY

ON THE 10TH OF SEPTEMBER 1840





ON THE
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,
AND THE
MEANS OF PRESERVING IT.

G A L. v. 4.

BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

SLAVERY is one of the greatest calamities of human life. In a civil view, it is extremely burdensome; as it respects religion, it is intolerable. It is torture to the body; but it is death to the mind.

Liberty, on the contrary, is the light and life and happiness of mankind. It opens to them all the valuable resources in creation. It originates their enterprise, and stimulates their industry. It gives to the mind all its improvements, to the manners all their independence. It is what constitutes the sweets of toil, the alacrity of study, the charm of wealth, the consolations of poverty, the endearments of friendship and social connections; what prepares a throne for the exaltation and glory of religion; what diffuses cheerfulness through the world.

So thought the noble spirits, from whom we boast our descent. Impressed with these sentiments of freedom, and suffering, at the same time, the scourge of ecclesiastic tyranny, in their native isle, they framed a purpose, whose accomplishment is an event of no inconsiderable magnitude, in the history of America. Our ancestors abandoned the shores of Britain: they sought the rights of conscience and of man amid Columbian wilds.

In this country, they found in perfection that religious freedom, the want of which, at the first, inspired them with the ardor of emigration, and which, with aid from the divine providence, had continued to supply them with the firmness, necessary for completing so hazardous a design.

Still, our progenitors, with their descendants, were subjects of the English government. They were connected with it by ties of affection and loyalty, as well as of interest. During the space of one century and a half, the colonies of New-England, together with the southern provinces of this continent, were united to their mother country. The interest of America was that of Britain; and Britain's sorrows drew tears from America. Conjoined they fought their battles; together they shared the spoils of the common foe. England, like a kind parent, long protected and fostered Columbia, who, in turn, like a dutiful child, carried home the little earnings of its industry, and cast them into the mother's lap.

The colonial population and wealth soon became considerable in the eye of Great-Britain. In time, they raised her pride; at length, they excited her jealousy. Accordingly our taxes were gradually, but severely, augmented. She proceeded to raise from us a revenue without our consent. A measure of this kind was not to be tolerated.

It subsided.* Yet other acts of parliament,† equally injurious in their tendency, shortly followed.

A panic of grief and disaffection had now stricken the breasts of Americans. We groaned by reason of oppression. We unitedly formed the resolution of supplicating the king. We petitioned. We petitioned in vain. We remonstrated; but without effect. Our petitions were answered by frowns; our remonstrances, with accumulated burdens.

THUS WERE WE ONCE ENTANGLED WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

But the time of trial and danger was nigh. Longer forbearance, on the part of Britain, who had proceeded thus far, had been subversive of her controul. Her edicts must meet compliance. We steadily refuse it. She must then exercise the usual engine of tyranny. She durst to do it; and, as if forsaken by the guardians of her interest and her God, poured into our metropolis her mercenary legions, to enforce, with the ball and bayonet, the execution of those laws, which could not receive our voluntary obedience.

The charm was now dissolved. The bond, which, by some nameless enchantment, tied us to the feet of Albion, broke. The vizard had fallen from her face. Her purposes of subjugation and vassalage were manifest. We, therefore, feared not to examine the foundation of *hereditary right*;

* The noted *Stamp Act*, which obliged the colonists to pay a heavy duty on *stamped paper*, and to use that only for bonds, notes, &c. was passed in Parliament, March, 1765, and repealed in the same month of the following year. The repeal, however, was succeeded by a *Declaratory Act* more subversive of colonial liberty, than the former. It said, "That the Parliament had, and of right, ought to have, the power to bind the colonies, in all cases whatsoever."

† The *Tea Act* of 1767, the *Boston Port Bill* of 1774, and the *Fishery Bill* of 1775.

nor openly to question the *prerogative of kings*. We found them a nullity. We named them harmless creatures, that were born in the brains of despots only, and nursed by the false fears of their flatterers. It was, thence, determined, they should no longer affright us. We resolved on opposition to a monarchic claim, which, hostile to the intentions of nature and nature's God, would enslave us and our children forever. We would alienate ourselves from the crown; a crown, which glittered, at the distance of three thousand miles, not, as formerly, with the mild rays of apparent freedom, but with the fiery terrors of arbitrary power, but too openly avowed. We swore no longer to crouch the involuntary minions of a sovereign, whose corrupt ministry and venal parliament were wresting from our possession the last remains of liberty. We grasped the sword. Fresh acts of British insolence and cruelty forced it from the scabbard. We then appealed to heaven for the justice of our defence. Our appeal was heard; and the cry, to arms! with a pious enthusiasm, resounded throughout the cities and forests of America.

I pass, in silence, the horrors of that memorable night,* when the troops of Britain covered the plains of Lexington, encrimsoning them with the earliest effusion of American blood, and uttering, from the cannon's mouth, an unwelcome prologue to those sanguinary scenes, which were afterwards acted in all parts of the continent. I will not throw gloom on this joyous hour by the description of that day of carnage, when the streams of Concord were tinged with human gore, and first learned to flow in union with the life of their countrymen.

* Between the 18, and 19, of April, 1775.

It is enough, that hostilities were seriously commenced ; that combinations, spirited and effectual, for the prosecution of the war, were formed among the provinces ; and that we persisted in our righteous cause, with various success, until the *fourth day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand, seven hundred, and seventy six, when, by our delegates, in congress assembled, we declared ourselves, united, free, sovereign, and independent States !*"

WE ARE NOW DISENTANGLED FROM THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

This is the day, my countrymen, and this the event, we now celebrate. This act, at once, and forever, dismembered us from Great Britain. It shivered to atoms an accursed yoke, which neither we, nor our fathers, were able to bear. In this one day, our nation was born ; and modestly assumed rank with the old empires of the world.

Hail, happy day ! Blissful epoch, hail ! Since which, our earth hath twice times nine performed her annual courses round the orb of day, and at each revolution, seen her favored country independent. Thrice hail ! most auspicious era. whose genial light discovered a path to the posterior victory and peace of the United States. Yes, friends, it was the prototype of the present anniversary, that formed the characters in which your national felicity has long been so fairly written. It is hence, I am enabled, at this time, to gratulate you, as having, for eighteen years, eaten the bread, drunken the waters, spoken the language, worn the habits, of sons and daughters of liberty. The Almighty forever grant, that ye

BE NOT AGAIN ENTANGLED WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE !

This, Americans, is not, however, to be expected by miraculous interpositions of the divine providence. To preserve yourselves free and independent, the same efforts, in kind, must be employed, which first unbound your millions from the tyranny of England. To this end, in particular, two things must principally conduce. They are *a due cultivation of useful and religious knowledge, and some very considerable attention to the military art.*

Of the importance of the former, towards attaining the object proposed, all history is a full evi-
 ction. That of the Jews, though their government, for the most part, was monarchical, is instanced. This nation never enjoyed their immunities in a higher degree, than under the reign of King Solomon. It was because he taught them the arts and sciences of life, and gave them lessons of religion and virtue. Both before this time, and in subsequent periods, while they understood and kept their law, they maintained their freedom from foreign thralldom. As soon, as they became careless of their scriptures, and idolatrous in their practices, they lost their Canaan, they were carried into captivity. And why were they so long in bondage? Why, for four hundred years, previously to the advent of Messiah, were they favoured with neither message nor deliverance from on high? Was it not because, O Jerusalem, thou killedst thy prophets, and stonedst them, who were sent to instruct thee?

What raised the states of antient Greece to the possession of such perfect liberty, except learning? What, if not their virtues, so long preserved their noble independence? It was the literature of the Romans; it was their regard to the gods, and their virtuous principles, which, for ages, gave to

them the sovereignty of the earth. But when ignorance succeeded to the learning of these mighty republics; when a sense of moral obligations ceased to be cherished among them, then their freedom was exchanged for servitude; their independence, for vassalage.

I point you to more modern times. Look into the extensive realms of Asia. Look also into Africa. See those most ancient quarters of the globe overspread with despotism. At the same time, know, that want of good and general education is the melancholy cause.

Survey that part of the world, which has sometimes prided itself, as containing all the knowledge and all the virtue of the present age; survey Europe. Ye shall there find, I may say, millions of human beings, shown to be such only by their countenance and form. What is their political condition? Very little better, than that of downright slavery. To the ignorance and consequent vices of the commonalty of Europe is it owing, that they are so universally the submissive subjects of monarchies completely absolute, of monarchies but too unlimited, or, at best, of aristocracies, where the nobles are like mountains, which, though they prevent not the sun from shining, yet effectually engross its influence from the vales below. Hence multitudes of Europeans have scarcely the shadow of liberty. Hence, their countless hosts, are now forced into war, in opposition to their will, and are at this moment, butchering, in cold blood, their brothers of the human race, whom they never saw, and, therefore cannot but love, solely to gratify the ambition and avarice of some few despots, or some dozens of aspiring demagogues. These are thy trophies, ignorance!

It is but just to acknowledge, that the republic

of France now makes an exception to these remarks. It is to be hoped, she wages war with tyranny, not with men; that she fights for freedom, not for conquest; that her soldiery carry with them their hearts to the battle; and that her cause is that of all mankind. May God blot out her crimes, and establish her liberties!

I cease referring you to remote proofs of the truth, I would impress upon your minds. Within the compass of your own unavoidable observation, freemen, ye have plenary evidence, that national freedom and independence cannot be propagated and supported, except by the means of national knowledge and religion. To the successful operation of these means, ye are vastly indebted for the glorious event, which is this day celebrated. It was your universities, your academies, your schools, those nurseries of learning; it was your churches, those nurseries of virtue, that prepared the way for your independence, and directed you to the measures of effectuating a revolution, which has astonished the universe.

Let those seminaries of science, then, be still the objects of your regard and charity; let your temples continue to command your reverence and love. Thither conduct your youth and children. Teach them knowledge, and they will, probably, *preserve* their freedom; teach them religion, and they will be sure to use *rightly* that inestimable blessing.

Notwithstanding the due cultivation of useful and religious knowledge, among a free people, has a direct tendency to the maintenance of their liberties, it is not, yet, alone, invariably, effectual to that end. The present corrupted state of civil society seems to render other means of self defence, than just reasonings and upright conduct, often necessary.

A principle of self preservation is the first principle in nature. It was implanted there by nature's author. Self preservation is then a part of natural religion. And if so, it is not repugnant to revealed religion. On the other hand, we know, that personal defence, and the preservation of political rights, were not only, by means of arms, permitted, but enjoined on the Jews. They oftentimes, indeed, waged war, by the divine command, for the sake of conquest. It is true, our Savior introduced a new dispensation among men. He came not to destroy, but to save, the lives of mankind. He confessed on a remarkable occasion,* that his kingdom was not of this world; and at the same time, expressed his pleasure, that his servants should not fight to defend it. But Jesus neither then, nor ever, forbade his servants to preserve with the sword their natural rights and political governments, when to preserve them, other means of defence became insufficient.

In order, now, that arms be successfully employed, when an assumption of them against an enemy shall be justifiable on the principles of reason and religion, it is evidently proper, that an acquaintance with them be obtained, when no immediate necessity for them is apparent. Else the sudden invasion of a country will be the destruction of its liberties. And such an invasion, by the rapacious and tyrannical, may always be expected from a people, who, rising in the scale of wealth and national importance, are yet in the habits of ease, and in utter neglect of the warlike arts. So that, as long, as principles of injustice and disorder maintain any authority over the kingdoms of this world, so long must even a christian nation, to preserve their independence, train their bodies to the exercise of arms, as well, as their minds to knowledge and virtue.

* See John xviii. 36.

America, however, especially this commonwealth, has tasted the too bitter effects of standing armies, in time of peace. From what other quarter, then, are we to expect that skill ~~in~~ the military art, which forms the second mean of preventing future subjection to a yoke of bondage? From the brave and well disciplined militia of the land. It is from you,

Gentlemen officers and soldiers, who compose a part of the militia of the United States; it is from you we expect that theoretic acquaintance with the art of war, which, when occasion presses, will enable you to be our sure defence, and which your profession, and the love of glory will incite you to obtain. Your daily culture of the arts of peace, and the sweets of domestic repose, must not cause you to forget, that ye are soldiers, and that ye assist to form one strong and beautiful pillar of your country's freedom. Amid your agricultural pursuits, the acquisition of some knowledge in tactics will certainly claim a portion of your time; nor will your arms be permitted to rust through an uninterrupted attention to mechanic employments. Frequent exertions in the line of military duty will serve, as an agreeable relaxation from severer occupations, will feed the flame of patriotism in your souls, and gently inure your bodies to the fatigues of a camp.

In proportion, as a prospect of war, at any time, increases, your exercise of arms will be more solemn and vigorous. Would! I were permitted to tell you, that the politics of our nation now wear no threatening aspect. I am forbidden to suppress my fears in this respect.

Men in arms! The present day is pregnant with events of uncommon magnitude. War blows his clarion among the nations. The temple of

Janus is opened in all the world. The battle of the European warriors is indeed with a confused noise. It is the bruit of a war, which originated, on the one hand, in the too sanguine hope of planting the tree of liberty in every clime, and is prosecuted, on the other, with an unwarrantable acrimony against a mighty nation, struggling to be free, if not in direct repugnance to the natural rights of mankind, and the laws of eternal justice. If, in this huge contest between the sentiments of equal liberty, and the unnatural systems of arbitrary power, the latter should prevail, America, in tears, will behold the triumph. It is even possible she may be called to defend anew her present claim to the joys of independence. Should such an event, in this age of war, betide us, which God avert! to you, as to the supporters of your country's rights, shall we look for protection. If ever called to the field, we trust, ye will remember from whom ye descend. Ye will recollect, that ye are no other, than the pure progeny of those rare heroes, who preferred the horrors of a wilderness, with liberty, to the refinements of civilized life, with an abridgement of their native rights; who braved the dangers of an untried ocean; hazarded the barbarity of savages; endured the whole of toils, incident to the planters of a new world. Ye will feel, that ye are the brethren, and the sons, of men, who, in our late glorious conflict, won wreaths of laurel on the plains of Mars; men, who almost worshipped liberty; who relinquished all they dearest held to fight her cause; who, in the moment of encounter, made bare their bosoms to the sword, and received a copious death. The same cause, the same motives, will swell your breasts, and urge you to like valor. Already we own your guardian power. To you, your fair wives and

smiling children, your paternal houses and your grounds, your hearths, your household goods, to you, the religion of your country, and the tabernacles of your God, to you all these even now look up for safety. Again, I say, should ye be summoned to their defence, may ye seek its glory at the very point of the sabre ! And may the God of armies, the Lord of hosts, he who led our Washington, with the troops of Columbia, to former victories, may that God cover your heads in the day of battle ! May he teach your hands to war, and your fingers to fight ; enable you to be of good courage, to play the men for your people, and the cities of your God ; and return you to the embraces of your fond friends, and your loved firesides, loaded with the spoils of righteous conquest, and your temples filleted with garlands of well earned fame !

Christian friends and fellow citizens ! It is beautiful to behold the mingled pleasure and devotions, with which ye honor this national festival. Would ye annually bring like offerings to liberty ? Cultivate the means, by which she was first won. Unite in cherishing every species of useful and religious knowledge, and to their literary and humane acquirements, let your sons add hardihood and skill in the arts of war. Thus shall ye be properly prepared to defend your valuable soil. Thus shall ye testify your just attachment to the FEDERAL CONSTITUTION, that prodigy of human wisdom, and glory of your land ; reward the services of your old and faithful rulers ; keep inviolate the rights of conscience, and the voluntary worship of God ; and, in fine, ye may thus rationally hope, that the raptures of independence, which now thrill your veins, will circulate with the blood of all your descendants.

In giving these *mixed* exhortations, let it not be thought, that I deviate from the path of a christian minister. Christianity is a religion full of truth, and full of reason. And the knowledge of truth, and the exercise of reason, as they constitute the greatest individual freedom, so they impel to the devising and recommending of all lawful means for the security of freedom among communities and nations.

Let it, nevertheless, be seriously remembered, that, apart from temporary and political considerations, we are, in a peculiar sense, the scholars, and the soldiers of Jesus Christ. We are taught in his school; we are enlisted under his banner. It is true, none of us has ever been entangled with the yoke of Jewish ordinances, nor been bound to the observance of mosaic rites. But we have all, alas! been too much enslaved by bad passions, too much under the dominion of evil habits. Let us break the yoke of this unnatural and worst kind of bondage from off us, and never again be entangled with it. Through the knowledge of our Lord and his gospel, let us conquer all our vices, and surrender ourselves to the possession of those virtues, which, it is designed, shall give the truest liberty to the human race. For however numerous the present captives of sin, rejoice in this, ye followers of Jesus, christianity shall yet emancipate the world. It shall do more. It shall enfranchise the prisoners of the tomb. The time shall come, when, loosed from the bands of death and the grave, the disciples of virtue, universally, shall own your Master, as the Captain of their redemption, who, putting palms of victory in their hands, and crowns of glory on their heads,

shall lead them away into a land of everlasting freedom, and make them kings and priests unto God, even his father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. AMEN.



7 NO 67

